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THE SEARCH FOR HEALTH

A Report from
The National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland

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"Quit For Good: A Practitioner's Stop-Smoking Guide"

The National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society have joined together to assist those who are in the best position to help smokers to stop smoking: doctors and other health professionals.

NCI and ACS developed a practical smoking cessation tool, "Quit for Good: A Practitioner's Stop-Smoking Guide," to provide health professionals a proven step-by-step process to help patients quit smoking. Steps outlined in the guide are based on the findings of NCI-funded intervention trials which began in 1984. These trials, involving more than 40,000 patients and 1,000 doctors, focus on how health professionals can best help patients to quit.

Nearly half of all living Americans who ever smoked have quit. However, more than 50 million people continue this habit which claims an estimated 390,000 lives each year. Cigarette smoking remains the single most important preventable cause of death in our society.

In the 1987 National Health Interview Survey, only 49 percent of current smokers reported that their physicians had ever advised them to quit.

Surveys show that physicians are often reluctant to raise the topic of smoking during an office visit unless patients already have an illness attributable to their smoking habits. Doctors may underestimate the health and cost savings of offering practical smoking advise to "well" patients. Based on a very conservative assumption that 1 percent of patients advised to quit smoking will succeed, researchers concluded that physician advice is as cost-effective as many other accepted medical practices—including treatment of moderate high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol—and should be a routine part of the health care of smokers.

The "Quit for Good" guide offers a streamlined approach to offering cessation advise that is centered around four basic steps:

- Ask all patients about their smok ing habits.
- Advise each smoker to quit.
- Assist willing smokers by setting a quit date, giving self-help materials, and prescribing nicotine gum if ap propriate.
- Arrange for follow-up support.

The guide also urges doctors to involve their office staff in identifying smokers, reviewing quit tips and following up on patients who are trying to quit smoking. Patients are more likely to succeed if they know they have a source of support in both the doctor and his or her staff.

"Quit for Good: A Practitioner's Stop Smoking Guide" is the latest effort by NCI and ACS to improve the participation and skills of health professionals in smoking cessation.

To obtain free brochures and information on smoking, write to the National Cancer Institute, Building 31, Room 10A24, Bethesda, Maryland 20892 or call toll free 1-800-4-CANCER.

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